DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 819 EA 021 268

AUTHOR Bladh, Agneta; Wallin, Gunnar
TITLE The Steering Function of Central Government Agencies in a Decentralised School Administration.
INSTITUTION National Swedish Board of Education, Stockholm.
PUB DATE Feb 89
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT School Research Newsletter; v1 Feb 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Boards of Education; Change Strategies; *Decentralization; *Educational Administration; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Organizational Change; Politics of Education; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Sweden

ABSTRACT

A survey of decentralization efforts of the central administrative boards in Sweden shows that over the past half-century, very little happened until the 1980s. As a result, administrative boards acquired fewer regulatory and more informative, activating, and investigative duties. This paper describes the relationships of three national administrative boards, viz, the National Board of Education (NBE), the National Board of Health and Welfare, and the National Board of Education (NBE), the National Board of Health and Welfare, and the National Board of Universities and Colleges with the Government and the Rikdag. All three have comprehensive national statistics at their disposal and have undertaken various types of audits and programs of evaluation but a good deal remains to be developed. It is observable that central national administration has become more monolithic, a departure from the traditional binary system in which ministries are clearly segregated from administrative boards. The close cooperation established between the Ministry of Education and the NBE corroborates this conclusion. A high level of conflict exists within the NBE Directorate, but this is probably due to the implementation process, and the "common property" character of school affairs. (SI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314819

SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 1989 FIELD TOPIC 1989:1
Decentralised School Administration

Concluded Project:
TITLE OF PROJECT: THE STEERING FUNCTION OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN A DECENTRALISED SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION.

Decentralisation is a reforming strategy which has been increasingly resorted to in order to cope with a growing and more complicated public administration. This has had the effect of changing the duties of public agencies at different levels and investing them with new roles. The central administrative boards within decentralised fields in activity, for example, have undergone extensive changes with regards to powers, organisation and working methods. The purpose of the present project is to identify, describe and analyse those changes in a selection of administrative boards, with special reference to the NBE, and to indicate new relations between the boards and their political and administrative environment. The project has been described in two reports:

Bladh, Agneta: Decentraliserad förvaltning . Tre ämbetsverk i nya roller. (Decentralised administration. New roles for three administrative boards.) Studentlitteratur 1987.

Wallin, Gunnar: Lekmän och skoladministratörer. En studie av SÖ. F 88:6 (Laymen and school administrators. A study of the NBE.) Vad säger forskningen? Skolöverstyrelsen 1988.

THE PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED AT:
The Department of Political Science
Stockholm University
S- 106 91 STOCKHOLM
Tel: 08 - 16 30 90

SCIENTIFIC LEADER:
Gunnar Wallin

PROJECT LEADERS:
Agneta Bladh, Gunnar Wallin

PROJECT NUMBER:
6312 a

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Inger Marklund
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 021 268

NEWSLETTER 1983 - 1988

1983:1 Evaluation of Courses of Study at Upper Secondary School (UTGY)
1983:2 The Research Programme of The National Swedish Board of Education
1983:3 Science Subjects - An Evaluation of Student Achivement and Attitudes in International Perspective (IEA Science II)
1983:4 Evaluation through follow-up of students (UGU)
1983:5 Analysis of teacher-directed experimentation

1984:1 Children with early perceptual funcional disturbances. A follow-up during school years
1984:2 The SIAu Project: Project description
1984:3 Transition from compulsory and upper secondary school to further education or employment - the GUARANTEE project
1984:4 Vertical integration at junior and intermediate levels
1984:5 Learning to read
1984:6 Family support and development - a longitudinal, ecological study of families with children of fre-school and junior-level age (the FAST-Project)
1984:7 Study assistance and adult study assistance - utilisation and effects
1984:8 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary schools
1984:9 MEDIA PANEL

1985:1 Creativity and communication: music and art education - The KROK-project
1985:2 Childrens participation at junior level
1985:3 Programme for recurrent educational situation reports: school description models
1985:4 Discovery learning and cognitive development - the UKU-project
1985:5 Man in a changing society - MIS
1985:6 Systematic evaluation of the "forest in schools" project
1985:7 Evaluation of experimental concentration of studies in upper secondary school
1985:8 Pupils'working environment at school in use (EMILIA)
1985:9 Immigrant pupils at the senior level of compulsory school and in the upper secondary school

1986:1 Education - Society; Curricular theory
1986:2 IEA Written composition study
1986:3 UTRES - Evaluation of resource utilisation in upper secondary school
1986:4 Technology and science in school and society: Education, training, subsequent training
1986:5 Historical image and historical awareness
1986:6 Political and citizenship education in Swedish schools in the 20th century (the role and concept formation of social subjects)
1986:7 Feasibility of joint studies in adult education
1986:8 Studies of the innovation process in compulsory school
1986:9 Girls in science and technology
1986:10 Evaluation trough pupil follow-up - the UGU project

1987:1 Young people and peace - prerequisites for peaceoriented istruction
1987:2 Functional opportunities of the school administration in municipalities with local agencies and free municipality experiments
1987:3 Steering strategies in a decentralised decitionmaking system
1987:4 The outward efficiency of schools
1987:5 Swedish in upper secondary school - two worlds?

1988:1 META STUDIES
1988:2 Pupils' frames of reference and the content of teaching
1988:3 Follow-up of the in-service training programme "An upper secondary school for all"
1988:4 A Cognitive Taxonomy for Mathematics Teaching
1988:5 Psychological Mechanisms in Children with deficient Empathy and Sympathy

Why this study?

Empirical studies of the central administrative boards in Sweden have been few and far between in recent years. For this reason alone, a scientific study of this part of the central administration of government is urgently needed, and it is rendered all the more interesting by the intensive reforms that have taken place in the 1980s. Particularly in fields of activity where there has been extensive decentralisation, the organisation of the administrative boards, their working methods and their duties have all been transformed, which in turn has led to a change in their relations with their political and administrative surroundings: policy levers vis-à-vis the municipalities have changed character, and in several respects activities have grown increasingly similar to those traditionally undertaken at departmental (ministerial) level. A study observing this last mentioned phenomenon among other things will, one hopes, be able to contribute towards a discussion of the suitability of the specifically Swedish administrative model, with its dichotomy between government departments (ministries) and administrative boards.

Which boards is the NBE compared with?

A study of the NBE is rendered more interesting by viewing the Board in a wider context. Bladh's study is devoted to three national administrative boards, viz the NBE, the National Board of Health and Welfare (SoS) and the National Board of Universities and Colleges (UHÄ). These three boards were selected because their future roles had been discussed at length by Government and Riksdag in connection with policy decisions, and also because between them they cover important sectors of the welfare society: schools, social welfare, health and medical care, and higher education. In Wallin's study, which is mainly concerned with the management function at the NBE, comparisons are made with the tasks which the Administrative Directorates Committee once defined for the majority of central administrative boards.

Findings

A survey of decentralisation efforts over the past half-century shows that, despite many official inquiries and an intermittently intensive debate, very little happened until the 1980s. The 1970s were the decade

of relocations. Since that reform made no difference to the apportionment of responsibilities between different levels and agencies, it is not included in the decentralisation concept which the present study employs.

The decentralisation measures taken during the 1980s can generally be said to have resulted in the administrative boards acquiring fewer regulatory and more informative, activating and investigative duties.

The review of steering instruments shows that all administrative boards are making progressively less use of official regulations, just as was envisaged in the report of the 1975 Decentralisation Commission. The general recommendations issued are more often to be found in special publications than in codified regulations. Publishing output has steadily increased, but this is not directly connected with a change in the division of responsibilities. The borderline between what, formally speaking, is a general recommendation (eligible for inclusion in codified regulations) and other information issued by administrative boards is steadily disappearing.

The conditions laid down by the Government and Riksdag in the form of goals for the activities of central administrative boards display varying degrees of precision. The Government and Riksdag have been most distinct in the school sector, least in the higher education sector. Indications given by the Government and Riksdag, or lack of them, probably do a great deal to influence the way in which general recommendations by administrative boards are received by those concerned.

In resource terms, the central administrative boards today have little opportunity of influencing developments, except indirectly through their budget requests. One instrument in keeping with the growth of management by information, however, comprises the special incentive funds which the central administrative boards have at their disposal and which they use as a means of conditioning attitudes and conducting experiments of various kinds which the Government and Riksdag and the central administrative boards themselves find worthy of encouragement. This indicates that the central administrative boards still have an active view concerning what amounts to suitable or not-so-suitable development. Statements by the Government and Riksdag, of course, are a natural point of departure. The

increasingly widespread use of general or paving legislation, however, results in the intentions of Government and Riksdag being expressed mainly as relatively generalised objectives which have to be made more articulate in order to be operationalised. The central administrative boards participate to no mean extent in this closer definition of goals, a task in which the NBE has more explicit governmental support than the other two administrative boards.

Having transformed the allocation of responsibilities and equipped various regional and local agencies with additional powers, the Government and Riksdag have also come to demand feedback. What role, then, has been allotted to the central administrative boards in the matter of informing the Government and Riksdag about the more detailed aspects of planning and developments in their various fields. How is one to describe the follow-up and evaluative activities of the three central administrative boards?

All three have comprehensive national statistics at their disposal. In addition, they have all undertaken various types of audit, mostly in the form of one-off, delimited phenomena which could be initiated at a different level within the system. There have, however, been evaluations of more comprehensive changes of activity. The specific nature of this type of follow-up lies not only in its nationwide compass but also in the requirement that it be made a continuous element of activities. Thus an evaluation no longer requires a specific reform as its starting point; instead it is based on the general goals formulated by the Riksdag and Government. The NBE has embarked on a national programme of evaluation, and the National Board of Health and Welfare has been instructed by the Government to present recurrent reports on public health. The central administrative boards, then, are all set for follow-up, but a great deal remains to be developed. Demands from the Riksdag and Government for comprehensive, continuous follow-up may grow more insistent, as a result of the successive introduction of three-year budgeting.

Of the three central administrative boards investigated, the National Board of Health and Welfare still has relatively comprehensive advisory activities vis-à-vis municipalities and county councils. Otherwise the activities of the central administrative boards are shaped by the fact of a great deal of the material produced being intended as input documenta-

tion for the Government. This points to another change in the role of the central administrative boards within the national administration. Whereas formerly their activities were mainly addressed to subordinate levels within their various sectors, today their foremost task is to supply the Government and Riksdag with various kinds of input documentation for the adoption of political standpoints. Budget requests and long-term assessments have long been one such task incumbent on the central administrative boards. That role has now been enlarged to include follow-ups and various investigations on behalf of the Government. Thus the type of duty which the central administrative boards have tended more and more to discharge implies an increasing amount of common ground between them and the ministries (government departments).

Similarities of task between ministries and central administrative boards, as well as the element of input policy-making documentation in the duties of the central administrative boards, has made the latter increasingly dependent on senior ministerial officials and the Government. The Government has expanded its opportunities of influencing national authorities, partly by stepping up its informal contacts. And indeed, in the Government Bill on leadership of the national administration (Prop. 1986/87:99), the Minister of Civil administration notes that informal contacts between the Government and national authorities are an important ingredient in the Government's direction of the national administration. Thus the role of the central administrative boards has been transformed in such a way that central national administration has in practice become more of a monolithic system than is represented by the traditional binary system in which ministries are clearly segregated from administrative boards.

A study of the business discussed by the NBE Directorate serves to corroborate this conclusion. One finds that the great majority of directorate decisions have related to "strategic matters", whereas considerably less scope has been devoted to implementation questions and internal administrative decisions. A special scrutiny of the addressees of strategic business shows that no less than 90% was destined for the Government Chancery. The close co-operation thus established between the Ministry of Education and the NBE has, however, been felt to involve a risk of the clear apportionment of roles between political and administra-

tive agencies, underlined by the Government and Riksdag resolution in 1981 on the reform of school administration, becoming less and less clear. Another version of these problems was discussed both in the Riksdag and in the NBE Directorate with reference to the reform of upper secondary schooling. It was alleged that the Ministry and Board had shown tendencies of jointly taking control of the design of future upper secondary schooling, depriving the Riksdag of influence where the real decisions were concerned.

In several respects, the reform of school administration entailed reorganisation measures within the national school administration. For example, new principles were laid down concerning the recruitment of the Directorate: representatives of "special interests" were to be replaced by representatives of "public interests". Translated into provisions and actual recruitment bases, this meant above all that representatives of various interest organisations were replaced by spokesmen of the Riksdag parties. With just one exception, the political members of the Directorate nominated by the parties and appointed by the Government were all MPs. In the Riksdag they had specialised in school policy, as was indicated by their having served, as permanent members or alternates, on the Standing Committee on Education. A reform in 1984 increased the membership of the Directorate, whereupon the labour market organisations were re-admitted.

Decision-making within the Directorate has had its distinctive characteristics. For one thing, the level of conflict has been much higher than is normally associated with central administrative boards. This administration applies both before and after (up to and including 1st July 1986) the implementation of the reform of school administration, but controversy has changed character in that, during latter years, it has been much more along party political lines. This can be said to reflect a certain dimension, peculiar to the national schools administration, in relations between administrative level and political level.

How is the high level of conflict in the NBE Directorate to be explained? Part of the answer seems to be bound up with the character of the questions coming before the Directorate. Two viewpoints are worth bringing out here. One of them is that the NBE Directorate, unlike most

others, has very seldom had to consider pure measures of implementation. Its agenda has been dominated by strategic questions. In this respect the reform of school administration has not implied any change. A forum consisting of representatives of a whole variety of interests is likely, for general reasons, to have greater difficulty in reaching unanimity in matters of this kind. It happens less often, on the other hand, that actual disagreements on points of detail have to be taken to the lengths of dissenting opinions being appended to the record of proceedings. The second viewpoint concerns the special nature of school affairs. The fact of these questions, during the period under consideration, having played a very central, frequently controversial part in general political debate is vitally important, but there is another circumstance which, perhaps, provides an equally convincing explanation. One viewpoint which several members of the Directorate have expressed and which deserves to be taken into account is the "common-property" character of school affairs. All members of the general public have had personal experience of school, with the result that there are widespread, articulate opinions on very many school issues indeed. This in turn has led the news media to devote rigorous scrutiny to the activities of school agencies. As part of the NBE Directorate, therefore, several members have felt personally called upon to take a clear stand and to try to maintain it in confrontations with others around them, added to which, as representatives of a party or organisation, they have been intent on helping to give their principal a distinct profile.

SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

School Research Newsletter contains reviews of current and terminated research within the field of education.

School Research Newsletter is published and distributed in an edition of 600 issues ten times per year. The Newsletter is obtained free of charge.

Published by Swedish National Board of Education,
Department for Coordination and Planning.
S-106 42 Stockholm. Telephone +46 8 783 20 00
Responsible Editor: Inger Marklund. Editor: Cecilia Dahlberg
ISSN 0345-5343